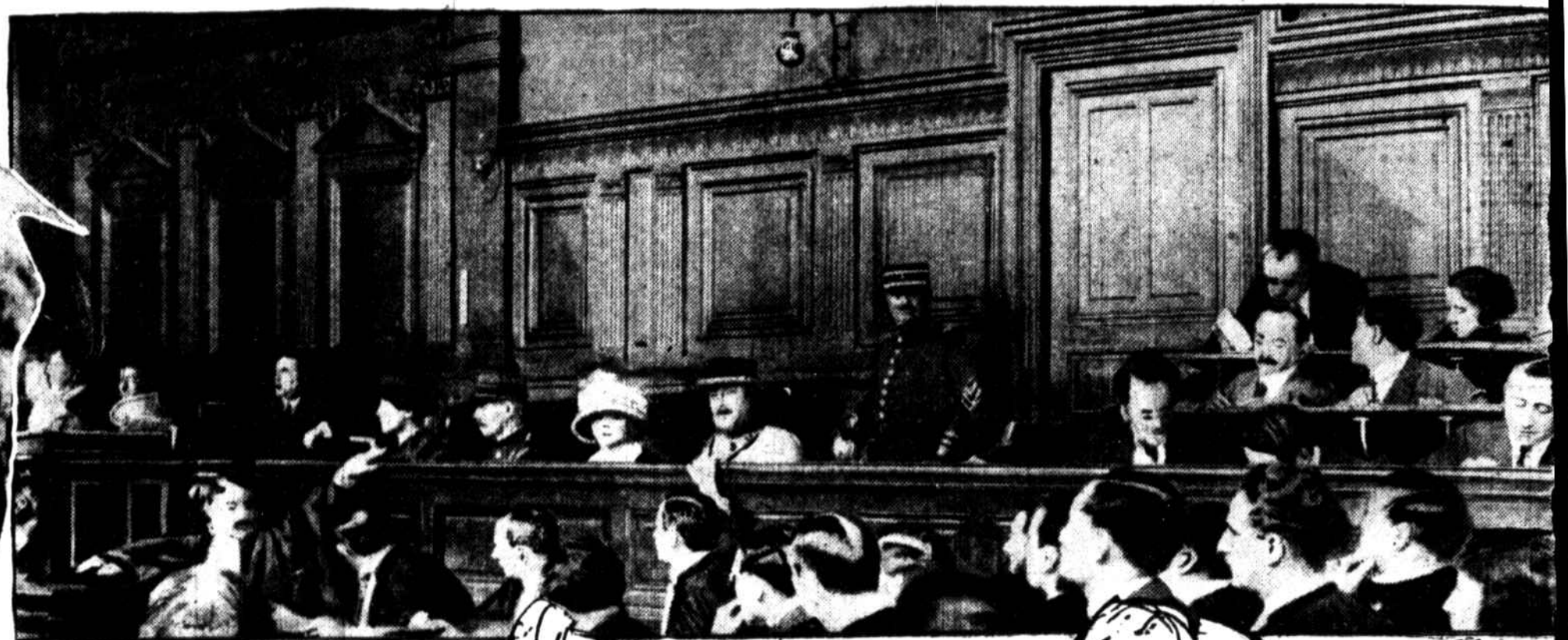


# The Mystery of My Husband

Madame Bessarabo, the Paris Poetess  
Murderess, Writes from Her Prison  
Quite as Remarkable as the Ho



Madame Bessarabo and Her Daughter Seated on "the Bench of the Accused" During Their Trial

Mlle. Paule Jacques, Whose Confession in the Last Hour of the Trial Caused Her Own Mother to Be Convicted.

By Mme. Louise Bessarabo (Hera Mirtel)  
CHAPTER III.

(Concluded from Last Sunday)

(C) 1922, by American Weekly, Inc. Great Britain Rights Reserved  
MY readers will understand from the last quoted testimony that I was tortured with anxiety by the ordeal to which my daughter was subjected.

With supreme courage my Paulette told the complete truth and bravely withstood the attempts to lure her to any false words—and yet a few days later, impulsively, she asserted that I had slain M. Bessarabo!

Had I been permitted to say all I knew and call all the witnesses I wished, the case would have appeared very different.

The facts which I know concerning my unhappy husband's disappearance are that on July 30, about 11:30 at night he arrived at the house—he had not come in to dinner. As he pulled some evening newspapers from his pocket a letter written by Mlle. Nollot, one of his girl secretaries and one of his mistresses, fell to the ground. There was naturally a violent scene when again I reproached him with his infidelity. Then to my surprise he suddenly burst into tears and knelt down at my feet.

"Hera, Hera," he said, "forgive me just this once more, and I swear to turn over a new leaf. I am going to cut away from all my bad associates, who have been leading me astray and making you miserable. I have reflected very carefully. To-morrow morning we will go to our little villa at Montmorency and there we will stay together for several weeks. It will be another honeymoon. And I am going to drop all these shady affairs into which I have been enticed. Lock up all the papers concerning them in the old trunk, and we will go through them at Montmorency and burn all those that are not needful."

Hopeful once again, I allowed myself to be convinced, and so we made it up. Next morning M. Bessarabo did not stay with us, as he had intended, but went out early, because he said that he had forgotten a rendezvous. Meanwhile Paule and I packed the dossiers of business dealings away in the old box and we then called for the hall porter to help us to cord it up. It was, I must remark, open when the hall porter came upstairs. He then carried it down to our cab, with some other luggage. We drove to the Gare du Nord, where M. Bessarabo was to have met us. He was not there. I then thought that perhaps yesterday's scene had been another comedy, and that after all he was meeting Mlle. Nollot at the Gare de Lyon. It took me but a minute to decide to go there, and off we bumped in the taxicab.

He was not there, and so again across the streets of Paris to the Gare du Nord. There we found my husband waiting for us. He was very angry at us for having kept him waiting, and was extremely curt in his remarks. He told us to get out and wait for him, and, getting into the cab again, drove off with it and the big trunk.

"Don't worry," he said as he left us. "I will be back in about an hour or so."

Surely enough in an hour the cab rolled up to the station again, and there on it was the box, but M. Bessarabo was not there. The driver of the cab brought with him a note in my husband's handwriting, telling us to take the trunk and register it through to Nancy railway station.

At Montmorency, in our little villa, we waited hour by hour for my husband to come, and he never turned up. At first I thought that he had gone back to one of his many mistresses. But it was not

so, for I was never to see him again. Two days later, anxious and worried, I went to the police and asked them to search for my husband. I told them that he ought to have met us, and how we had sent the trunk off to Nancy station.

A telegram to the police of that town at once caused my husband's death to be revealed. A body was found in the trunk, and from that to accusing me of the crime was for the police but one step.

When they came to arrest me I cried out my innocence, but it was useless. Both my daughter and myself were sent to St. Lazare prison, and kept there among the lowest of the low.

Then, tortured by Judge Bonin, who refused to believe me, and knowing that my daughter was accused also, and agonized by the fear for her from the contact with the terrible gaol associates, I thought that if I confessed and said "Yes, it was I who killed my husband because I had had a quarrel with him about the mistresses he was keeping"—I thought if I said that, they would let my little Paule go.

Judge Bonin looked so triumphant. "There you are," he said; "that is much better. A good confession like that!" And he rubbed his hands with satisfaction.

Poor man! If he had only reflected and thought that it was I who had told the police about the trunk that I had sent to Nancy! Would I have done that if I had known that my husband's body was in it, and I had murdered him myself? Would I not rather have put them on some other track and tried to deceive them?

Then after a few weeks more I saw that my daughter was still in prison, and I reflected. I thought of the honor of our name, and so I returned to the truth and told M. Bonin the truth, that I was innocent.

And so for two years we were kept in that fearful prison before being brought to trial. Two years of moral and physical torture.

Then came the tragedy of the trial and that last awful scene when my daughter, my little Paulette, failed in her strength and courage, and, terrified and driven to desperation by the threats of the prosecution, rose in court with frenzied gesture, adopted the new version of the alleged crime and saved herself and caused me to be condemned.

Much has been made of that confession. It was that alone which made possible my conviction and the cruel sentence against me. In order that my readers may know just what that confession was I quote it in full from the verbatim report of the trial:

STATEMENT BY Mlle. PAULE JACQUES—"You wish the truth, well, here it is. On July 31 at 8 o'clock in the morning I was awakened by an explosion. I got out of bed and noticed that the door of my room was locked. I was surprised at that, for I was never locked in like that."

"'Mamma,' I cried, 'what is the matter?'"  
"At this moment I thought I heard in the bathroom near my room the sound like a man gargling his throat, and I thought that it was my stepfather. I was reassured for a moment, but very soon fear seized me again. I called loudly for mamma, and she opened the door."

"'What is the matter?' I said to her."  
"'It is nothing,' she said. 'It is the water heater that is exploding.'"

"But in the mirror I saw—(Here the tears choked the words of Paule Jacques.) I saw a figure on the bed, and I understood!"

"'Mamma, what have you done?' I cried."  
"'It was he or me,' she answered."

Attitude of Paule Jacques at One Moment of Her Dramatic Confession. Sketches in Court by Ochs.



Paule Jacques: "I said, 'Mother, what have you done?'"

"I wanted to go and tell the Commissary of Police. My mother prevented me."

"'I wish no scandal in this house,' she said. 'You had better go to the sixth floor and find a trunk.'"

"I swear, yes, I swear that I am telling the truth. I could not refuse. I went to find the trunk. The lock would not work, and we went out to buy cords to do it up."

"Then we put the corpse in the trunk and started for Montmorency."

"A little while later I wrote this letter, letter by letter, as well as I could. I wrote it because it was necessary to make people believe that Bessarabo himself had requested the forwarding of the trunk to Nancy."

"It is I also who signed the power of attorney authorizing us to collect the commission of 600,000 francs, and not my mother. This is how it happened."

"'Paulette,' said my mother, 'here is a rough draft. Do it on the machine. I will try to have it signed by your father.'"

"But he did not sign it. I do not know whether it was on July 31, but one day my mother said to me. 'You must sign it, Paulette. After all, it is money that he owes us. And you know perfectly that the name of Bessarabo is false. Therefore sign Bessarabo, my child.'"

"And I signed. Now, I must tell you everything. There is the famous secret. Well, it is not a secret. I was sick in the prison of Saint Lazare. My doctors declared that in two months I should be buried. I then obtained permission that my mother might come from prison to my bedside. She came to me and said:

"'Paulette, I swear to you that I am innocent.'"  
"Nothing could have given me greater pleasure than to hear those words. I could die happily afterwards. And my mother added:

"'You heard the revolver shot, but you did not see everything. There was a man. There was also a man at the Gare du Nord.'"

"My mother did not say any more, for we were not alone. There were two keepers and a nun. But I understood. That is the secret, gentlemen, and I ask your pardon for having called it a secret."

"The two letters addressed to the Public Prosecutor in which Bessarabo was denounced as a spy were written by me. I wrote them at the dictation of my mother."

Who whispered to her that lie? Who told her to make up that story, which sent a feeling of stupor through the court when it was heard—the story of how she had been locked in her room, of how she had listened at the door and had heard suspicious sounds?

It is a question that I ask myself at the same time that I ask myself, How did my husband's body come to take the place of bundles of office papers in the

trunk found at Nancy station? These are two questions which need an answer.

The answer to both these questions will perhaps be known one day—the day when I have finished my work on the appeal I am making to the Supreme Court of Cassation. The answers will be known if and when the court orders the witnesses that I have asked for and who were not listened to during my trial to be summoned and heard.

Till then I can only resume my arguments of innocence in these two phrases:

1. Show me the guilty people calling a hall porter to cord a trunk which is standing open in which they have just placed a dead body.

2. Show me people who would kill a man for money which they know he does not possess when they themselves are in no need.

I suggested some possible clues to this mystery when I made my final statement at the trial. I quote my words:

"I have no desire to utter the name of Becker up to the present, because you might have said that I was accusing some one who had disappeared. No, M. Becker is not guilty."

"There are two men, gentlemen, who have disappeared tragically in this affair—my husband, who was 'found again' in the trunk, and Becker, who was found a suicide in the Bois de Boulogne."

"These two men did not commit suicide. They were so nearly of the same figure that if they had been caught in some compromising affair they could have made use of it to save themselves."

"The photograph which they have shown me of the corpse found in the trunk is not that of M. Bessarabo."

"After all, I loved that man; I have proved it, for I have paid in order that he might not go to prison, and if I had recognized him in the photograph which they show to me I should have fainted away. Now, I did not turn a hair, and that is because the man who was in the trunk and whose photograph they showed me was not my husband."

"No, gentlemen, it was not my husband who was in the trunk! My husband was very handsome; he was not the horror which was in the trunk! No, that horror could not be Georges Weismann (Georges Bessarabo). I believe that my husband is living, and that he is in New York. I have received a letter from an American general telling me so."

"For a year past Bessarabo said to me, 'They are going to kill me.' And yet every evening he came home to share my bed. Who will believe that I was going to kill him?"

The false confession from my daughter was dragged from her by fifteen days of solitary confinement. During this cruel ordeal her heredity was against her, for her father, Paul Jacques, died mad, and so did two of her uncles. Oh, I can say it now! When my daughter denied me, her mother, after those two years of heroism, I drank the chalice of my suffering to its very dregs. To see her bow her head